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Where Politics Isn't Topic A

By EDWIN McDOWELL

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WASHINGTON, May 25 — A full-page advertisement in the publishers' catalogue calls it the book of "a new breed of politician." But "One Man's Luck," the Gary Hart campaign biography that was set for publication in September, has been canceled by William Morrow & Company.

"It could have been a lot worse," said a Morrow official attending the convention here of the American Booksellers Association. "If the Hart publicity had broken a couple of months later we would have had to remainder the book, rather than just cancel the contract."

Mr. Hart's withdrawal from the race for the 1988 Democratic Presidential nomination after disclosures about a relationship with a Miami model has been the subject of occasional jokes at the convention, which concludes its four-day trade show on Tuesday. But, otherwise, politics has been low on the agenda of many of the 20,000 publishers and bookstore owners who gathered in this city that lives and breathes politics.

Games for the Holiday

"I came here for books, not politics or politicians," said Edward Morrow Jr., owner of Northshire Bookstore in Manchester Center, Vt., echoing a widely held sentiment.

It is probably just as well, since almost every politician who could do so left town for the holiday weekend.

Practically alone in holding down the fort was Representative Claude Pepper, a Florida Democrat whose biography, "Pepper: Eyewitness to a Century," written with Hays Gorey, will be published this fall. At a reception Sunday night, Mr. Pepper sang the praises of his publisher, Hartcourt Brace Jovanovich.

"It's the most agreeable relationship I've ever had," he said. "I wish Congress and the Rules Committee worked as smoothly."

Former Representative Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. was also in town, pressing the flesh for almost two hours Sunday night at the Cannon Caucus Room in the Capitol on behalf of his forthcoming memoir, "Man of the House" with



Costumed characters, promoting a book at the convention, posed for a photograph outside the Washington Convention Center.

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William Novak.

When Patricia Abé of San Francisco said she used to live in his district in Massachusetts, he replied, "Well, did you vote for me, honey?"

When Irma Heldman of Lyle Stuart publishers pleaded with him to run for President, the 74-year-old Mr. O'Neill shook his head and replied, "I saw what age did to the man in the White House."

And when a man from Oregon told him that in 1974 he painted Mr. O'Neill's house on Cape Cod, the guest of honor summoned his wife. "Mom," he said, "this is the guy who forgot to paint our shutters."

The Republicans also had their innings. At a publisher's party for Art

Buchwald and Tom Clancy — a party where the incoming Director of Central Intelligence, William H. Webster, arrived accompanied by at least four security officers with two-way radios and headphones — Mr. Clancy greeted the slightly abashed Robert S. Strauss, former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, with the news, "I'm a Republican."

The relative absence of political books for publication this fall may have to do with a publishing maxim that such books are risky if released so close to a major political campaign, when there is saturation news coverage of the candidates.

There are other risks as well. In the 1960's, W. W. Norton published a book by George Romney, the former Governor of Michigan who was seeking the Republican nomination.

"One week before publication," recalled Donald S. Lamm, Norton's chairman, "Romney came back from Vietnam and said he had been brainwashed. From that moment on the book was absolutely dead in the water."

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